

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

ProBatter brings the heat (and everything else)

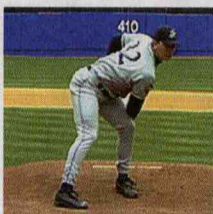
It has a video screen on which a pitcher goes through his windup; at his release point, a ball shoots through a hole in the screen. Sounds like a relatively basic pitching machine, right? *Way* wrong. The revolutionary ProBatter Professional (\$74,999; see ProBatter.com for more details) can throw any pitch to any location at any speed—splitters, cutters, sliders, sinkers, 100-mph fastballs, lefty or righty, from the stretch or the windup. And the list of buyers—including the Yankees, Red Sox, Indians, Mets and White Sox and several big-league players—is growing fast.

Nothing beats the real thing; the simulator is unable to emulate, for example, Randy Johnson's release point. Says big-leaguer David Wright, "A lot of guys swear by it, but it messes up my timing." Trot Nixon says it's great for practicing situational hitting. Jason



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

Our man looked like a halfway decent player. Unfortunately for him, the video screen pitcher was a stud and a half.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

Giambi bought one for his home. As a former college player and a current senior leaguer, I've seen my share of pitching machines—but nothing nearly this fun and challenging. Facing a Chris Carpenteresque repertoire, I was able to make good contact on fastballs up to 94 mph. The curves and sliders? Good night, Irene. And the first changeup almost shredded my back. But it's as close as I'll come to the experience of facing big-league pitching. And I'd have spent the whole day batting against that machine if it wouldn't have cost me my last shred of dignity. —*Brendan Roberts*

Sports talk with Rob Schneider

Actor, comedian, San Francisco Giants fan

TSN: So tell me a little bit about your movie (*The Benchwarmers*, in theaters April 7).

SCHNEIDER: It's about three older guys who start playing baseball again against these mean-spirited Little Leaguers. They become kind of the heroes among nerds.

TSN: Your character is supposed to be a pretty good player, right?

SCHNEIDER: Well, I had a coach for two months.

TSN: Who?

SCHNEIDER: Mike Cicione. He played pro ball—and he's still frustrated. Everyone's got some frustration about some athletic thing in their lives.

TSN: Do you have one?

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, I wish I could have been a better baseball player. I didn't know how to hit until I was about 30.

TSN: You got to participate in spring training with the Giants.



NAM Y. HUIH / AP

If he were a better ballplayer, would he cry out like this?

How was that?

SCHNEIDER: I hit in the same batting group as Moises Alou, Barry Bonds, Steve Finley, Ray Durham. That's a pretty good group.

TSN: So how'd you hold up?

SCHNEIDER: I did all right. Willie Mays was giving me tips: "Don't be doing too much stuff before the ball comes. That's too much information. A brain can't process all that. You've just got to stand up there, relax and swing at the ball."

TSN: Big Willie fan?

SCHNEIDER: Well, he was my hero when I was a kid.

TSN: What do you think of the whole Barry Bonds situation?

SCHNEIDER: Steroids don't make you great. If you take steroids and I take steroids, it's not going to help us hit a 90-mph fastball out of the park.

Now, it may help my testicles shrink up to my abdomen, and it may help my forehead get bigger and my back get full of zits ...

TSN: Would you rather win an Oscar or a World Series?

SCHNEIDER: Oscars are for elitists. World Series are forever. —*Tricia Garner*

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